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ABSTRACT

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (BRAC) Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Program is a nongovernmental rural development organization founded, managed, and staffed by Bangladeshis. In 1985 BRAC began a primary education program for the poorest rural children untouched by the formal school system. BRAC has developed well known and effective strategies for addressing education problems of poor rural communities. These strategies are based on intensive community participation, local recruitment of teachers, an emphasis on girls' education, relevant curriculum, flexible hours, and cost effectiveness. BRAC teachers are chosen from among the more educated in the village, with preference given to women. Successful candidates receive 12 days of training covering concepts and role-playing. Training is structured, learner-centered, and participatory, designed to allow the teachers to experience the kind of learning that they will be facilitating in the classroom. Teachers are taught to stress comprehension rather than memorization. Teachers also attend 2 days of orientation before the opening of schools and refresher sessions each month. More than 90 percent of BRAC students graduate, and a large proportion of them are admitted to grade 4 or higher in the government school system. (TD)

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BRAC's NFPE Program: Focus on Teacher Development Issues

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Introduction

The following paper is the result of preliminary research I conducted during the period of May 2001 until the present. This collection of information about the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (BRAC) Non-Formal Primary Education Program (NFPE) contributes to a growing body of knowledge being assembled by a large team of OISE/UT students and professors who are interested in alternative forms of non-formal primary education in the developing world. 'Developing world' I define as the non-industrial or semi-industrial, poorer nations of the world, ranked by the World Bank as low or middle income. The attached comprehensive bibliography offers resources for those interested in learning more about existing forms of alternative primary education in various parts of the developing world.

This paper has two parts. In the first section, background information about the growing interest in successful educational initiatives around the developing world is provided. In Part Two, BRAC's NFPE program is examined in detail.

Part One: Background Information

In general, educational initiatives in emerging nations have been unsuccessful in producing desired educational outcomes. In recent years, however, scholars have noted that there are, in fact, some innovative programs which have produced, and continue to produce, encouraging and impressive results (Colbert, et al., 1992; Farrell and Connelly, 1998; Lovell, 1992; Kochan, 2000). These programs have succeeded with limited resources in environments not generally regarded as being conducive to innovation. Innovators realize that a comprehensive 'blueprint' is often inappropriate for managing people-centered educational reforms. Projects designed to bring about change in education systems require a different form of planning. Detailed study of successful community schools can therefore provide clues about how basic education can be attained in the developing world of the 21st century.

Teacher development plays a central role in this attainment. Governments and donor agencies continue to have a very unclear grasp of the factors that contribute to the improvement of teaching. Reasons for this lack of clarity include: the limited, really useful research on teaching, teachers and their training, the need to synthesize the research that has been done and to analyze the critical factors that make a difference in education (Farrell and Oliveira, 1993; Rust and Dalin, 1990). In nations around the world there is a need to improve both the quality of teaching and research on teachers and their training and development.

Several studies have shown that community-based education programs are more effective than the traditional school system at delivering meaningful learning opportunities to children of populations thought to be the hardest to reach and hardest to teach (Farrell, 1998; Kochan, 2000; Lungwangwa, 1990; Prather, 1993; Psacharoupolos, Rojas and Velez, 1993). Effective community schools share several characteristics. Community-based and managed, these multi-grade schools typically have local support and innovative partnerships among government, private organizations, and communities. Curricula and teaching is locally relevant, child-centered, girl friendly and broadly based on those of formal national government syllabuses, modified and made relevant to the lives of the rural populations which they serve. Emphasis is put on developing students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills and creativity as the most effective mode and basis for life-long learning. Community schools are both cost effective and efficient. They have found success at creating large scale and affordable programs for quality education for deprived children. The community itself is brought into the school with all stakeholders playing a participatory role in education. What is most impressive is that students tend to perform as well as, if not better than, their traditional school cohorts on national exams. Moreover, students' levels of self-esteem increase through participation in community school initiatives.

Many community schools quantitatively measure student achievement, often in the form of primary school leaving exams. Parents want to know what their children are learning and how they are benefiting from going to school. Traditional achievement tests help to prove this. Community schools also focus on qualitatively understanding learning of both students and teachers, providing a reconnection of research interests to the realities of the classroom for teachers around the world. Translating data and research findings into language that policy makers and practitioners can understand, connecting theory with practice, is an ongoing challenge in the field of comparative and international education (Masemann, 1990, p. 465). Understanding how these community schools work is significant because non-formal primary education has the potential to serve developing nations to a degree equal to or greater than formal education (Brennen, 1997). Making sense of community schools is paramount to 'development' in every sense of the word.

Significance of Future Research

In nations world-wide there is a need to improve the quality of teaching and research on teachers and their training and development (Dove, 1986). Studying successful community schools and teacher development may help us to gain insight into what constitutes effective schooling. The study of teacher development is fascinating because research findings, from one cultural context and area of the world, "if used judiciously taking cultural sensitivities into account and with necessary adaptation, can have

relevance and applicability in another cultural context and can help teachers to make sense of their existing practices and enhance their skills" (Martin & Norwich, 1991, as cited in Khan, 1997, p. 4). This means that individuals who work in the field of education can collaborate by sharing and exchanging what they have learned in order to gain insight into how to improve the learning potential of their students, themselves and the communities in which they live (Farrell, 1987). The example of BRAC's NFPE Program discussed in Part Two shows that theory and practice can come together and that teacher development is directly linked to the development of community schools.

My particular area of interest in BRAC's NFPE Program revolves around the topic of teacher development. In trying to understand how BRAC's NFPE schools work so successfully, I propose to interview the teachers who work in these community schools. A major focus will be on understanding these educators, their reflections on their training, how they learn and their evolving teaching practices. Teachers are the front-line, key players in school reform. Their voices must be heard.

One main research question frames my research study: How and why do BRAC's NFPE teachers learn to teach so quickly and so well? Teacher development is the key area of investigation. Several interrelated additional questions support this inquiry including: How is it that poor, rural, mainly female children are learning so well? What goes on in BRAC's NFPE schools pedagogically? These questions can be asked of teachers first and then of all potential community members interviewed (BRAC staff, students, parents, and community members). Further, probing questions will evolve as the inquiry progresses and as the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the complex and multi-faceted topic being investigated.

Part Two: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Non-Formal Primary Education Program (NFPE)

Introduction

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (BRAC) Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Program provides the setting for this investigation. BRAC has developed some of the best-known and most effective strategies for addressing education problems of poor and/or rural communities, specifically targeting females, showing that poverty and gender are not insurmountable obstacles to primary education. BRAC's work suggests that paraprofessional teachers who are carefully yet quickly trained can be effective.

> BRAC has developed some of the best-known and most effective strategies for addressing education problems of poor rural communities. These strategies have built on the foundations of intensive community participation, local

recruitment of teachers, an emphasis on girls' education, the development of a relevant curriculum, flexible hours, and cost effectiveness (Oxfam (online), 2001, 3).

BRAC is a private, non-governmental, rural development organization founded, managed and staffed by Bangladeshis. It is the largest non-governmental organization in Bangladesh. BRAC is also a learning organization boasting a strongly participative strategy. In 1972, BRAC began as a small charitable relief organization helping to reconstruct the nation after its liberation war. By 1975, the NGO had developed materials based on the thoughts of Paulo Freire (1970) intended to raise social awareness and to provide literacy and numeracy to rural Bangladeshis. On the basis of the demand from the grassroots, BRAC revised the materials several times (Sarker, 1994, 4). The NGO gradually became a development organization and was one of the first organizations to start large-scale programs of non-formal primary education in Bangladesh.

In 1985 BRAC began a primary education program with 22 schools. This initiative came as a response to requests from rural parents, who had themselves taken part in BRAC's functional education programs, to improve the education of their children. BRAC discovered that the poorest children in the villages were not being reached by the government school system. The objective was to develop a replicable primary education model which could provide, in a short, three-year period, basic literacy and numeracy to the poorest rural children untouched by the formal school system (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 7). Girls were identified and targeted as being the most in need. By 1989, the program had expanded to 2,500 schools. In 1999, the program operated more than 35,000 schools in more than one quarter of rural Bangladeshi villages (Nath, 1999, 8). At total, 1.2 million children have been reached by BRAC's primary education programs (Oxfam (online), 2001, 3). BRAC's current mandate remains to provide primary education at the grassroots level to the poorest children in most villages of the country, thereby strengthening and supplementing the universal primary education program of the government. BRAC has thus provided a second chance to deprived, out-of-school children to complete primary education.

More than 90% of students who start in BRAC schools graduate and a large proportion of these graduates are admitted to grade four or higher in the government school system (Sharafuddin, 2001, 2). Effective management is the key to BRAC's success. BRAC has been able to undertake substantial and varied programs and to scale up rapidly while all the while maintaining both effectiveness and efficiency.

BRAC Philosophy

There are several key principles and explanations that summarize BRAC thinking:

- No matter how illiterate or poor a person is, he or she, if given the opportunity, can rise to the occasion and deal with problems
- A development organization should never become a patron
- Conscientization is necessary to empowerment
- Self-reliance is essential
- Participation and people-centeredness are essential
- Sustainability is essential
- There is no one 'fix-all' approach
- Going-to-scale is essential
- A market perspective and entrepreneurial spirit are useful
- The importance of women in development is primary (Lovell, 1992, 24).

Brief Country Profile

Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971. The nation is poor both in per capita income and in human capital. 45% of its population of more than 115 million lives below the poverty line (Khandker, 1996, 1). Extensive landlessness, fragmentation of land holdings, vigorous agricultural growth strategies based on the expansion of irrigated area, and the inability of other sections to absorb significant numbers of underemployed surplus labour in the economy characterize the nation (Lovell, 1992, 9). The population density is extremely high, at over 8,000 persons per kilometer squared. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy in Bangladesh with 80% of about 120 million people living in 86,000 villages (Sharafuddin, 2001, 1). Although about 80% of Bangladesh's population lives in rural areas 70% of money spent on education goes to urban areas alone and mostly to higher education (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 8). Another significant characteristic is that rural Bangladeshis have time to go to meetings and large groups can be assembled easily from within a very short radius. The great density of the rural areas means that a relatively small number of BRAC staff members can reach a very large number of villagers.

BRAC's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Program

BRAC's primary education experience has proved that paraprofessional teachers who are carefully yet quickly trained and paid a small stipend, can be effective. In addition, BRAC's work has shown that extensive parent and community involvement is important for success. The BRAC NFPE program has also recently been adapted for urban children in Bangladesh, especially for those working in the garment industry (Farrell, 1998). Bangladeshi government schools are adopting key elements of its model. The BRAC pedagogical model has spread to other nations in the region as well.

> The BRAC experience suggests that there are variables more important than poverty that influence parents' and children's decisions about school enrollment and attendance. Relevant curricula, dedicated and well-supervised teachers, reasonable class size, parent involvement, accessibility of schools to home and low cost are apparently significant variables (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 9).

Experts from UNICEF and the Rockefeller Foundation regard BRAC's NFPE programs as a blueprint for low cost non-formal education in rural areas (Kochan, 2000).

BRAC schools lie in rural villages and the children selected for admission belong to families of the poorest of the landless. Nearly 70% of rural families are landless. There is very limited wage employment except for part-time work on farms (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 9). Girls are a special focus in the NFPE program since women are responsible for the care of children, for the health of their families, for nutrition and hygiene. Research shows that women with even a small amount of education tend to be more receptive to new ideas, to family planning, to nutrition teaching, to improvements in hygiene and sanitation, and to understanding about immunization and diarrhea control. BRAC education aims to bring a sense of self-worth to its students (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 10).

BRAC has two different primary school models directed to two different age groups. The first program is called the Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Program. It is a three-year program for 8 to 10 year olds who have never enrolled in school or who have dropped out during the first grade. Every three years a new class is started and continues with the same one teacher until the course is completed. Students are drawn from the same village or cluster of villages thus making the schools close to the children's homes. "If new classes were started every year for one age cohort, the schools would have to be much farther apart and would lose their village character and oversight (Lovell, 1992, 51)". Classes meet for two and a half hours each day for the first and second grades and three hours for the third. Several criteria exist for selecting villages where BRAC schools will be located including parent demand, availability of teacher candidates and proximity to a cluster of other villages that meet the first two criteria. "For management, supervision and continuing teacher training, clustering of the schools is essential (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 9)". The NFPE is consistent with the strategy for the development of rural areas (Sarker, 1994, 4).

The second model started in 1988 with a two-year program called Kisho-Kishori (KK) for children 11 to 16 years old who have never attended school or who have dropped out of government primary schools and are unlikely to return. This program is called the Primary Education for Older Children (PEOC). A new class starts every two years. The goal of both programs is to have 70 % girls in the

schools. To date, 65.70 % of students have been female in the NFPE and 73.43% in the PEOC (Lovell, 1992, 51).

In both programs during meetings the teachers and the parents decide the particular time that classes are held in each village. Classes are conducted six days a week for an average of 268 days a year. BRAC's educational specialists feel that long vacations interrupt and reduce learning. These programs are not planned to be alternatives or substitutes for the education provided in the government primary schools but rather as complementary and supplementary programs, aimed at dealing with dropouts and non-starters among the country's poorest families, until such a time as the primary school system can cope more effectively with the problem.

The student-teacher ratio is kept to 33 students per teacher no matter how strong the demand from the community. If the demand is great a second school can be started in the same village if a second teacher can be found. There is usually a waiting list for potential teachers. One criterion for choosing a village where a new BRAC school will potentially be opened is whether an acceptable person to be trained as a teacher can be found. The teacher waiting list is useful if a teacher must move away or quit for some reason. Generally, the relationship between teacher and student in a BRAC school is close because of the small class size and because the students stay with the same teacher for all three years. Children feel secure in these schools because they are close to their homes and close to the teacher's home. Students live within about a two-kilometer radius of the school (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 20).

Physical Description of BRAC Schools

Instruction is provided in a one-room premises, at least 240 square feet in size, that is rented for three hours a day. The structure is usually made of bamboo with mud walls, an earthen floor, a tin roof and a blackboard. Children sit on bamboo mats on the floor, holding their slate boards on their knees. Each child receives a slate, pencils, notebooks and textbooks. The teacher has a stool and a metal trunk that serves as a desk as well as a supply cabinet. In the school building, children usually sit in a "U" shape but are free to move around as they help one another, go to do work on the blackboard or to see the teacher at her stool. Often, pupils are divided into small working groups in which the quick-learners help the slower ones. Unlike the Escuela Nueva system, BRAC pupils all move together through the lessons at the same pace (Sharafuddin, 2001, 3).

Curriculum

Instruction in core subjects is broken up with co-curricular activities. Children are expected to learn their lessons while in the classroom. Only small amounts of homework are assigned and being done

independently as most parents are illiterate and can offer little help. This attitude is very different from the one in government schools where teachers assume that much of the learning will take place outside the classroom. Large amounts of homework are assigned regularly in these schools (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 11). As BRAC classes number no more than 33 students, children can participate actively. The teacher may read model passages but each child is also given the chance to read to the class. During social studies the topics are discussed, not "taught". A teacher often calls a student to the board and other children are encouraged to help by discussing and correcting what the student writes (Ibid., 19).

BRAC Teachers

BRAC teachers are chosen from among the more educated in the village. A person selected to be trained as a BRAC teacher must have completed nine or more years of school and must be married. Preference is given to women who make up the majority (75%) of the teaching force. Teachers are hired on a temporary, part-time basis. Teacher selection occurs through an interview process conducted by BRAC's field managers in a location near the village. The applicant is asked to complete a series of tasks including reading a newspaper aloud, writing on the blackboard, writing an address on an envelope and conversing with the interviewing committee. Good basic literacy and numeracy, strong common sense, presence, ability to articulate, and interest in children are attributes desired in potential BRAC teachers (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 13). Successful candidates receive 12 days of training in one of BRAC's five residential training centers or in area offices.

Teachers receive a small monthly stipend, about 350 Taka per month (about US $ 10) the first year, 375 Taka the second year, and 400 Taka the third year. This stipend can be compared to the monthly salaries of government teachers which average about 1,200 Taka per month. The average monthly income of the families of the BRAC students is about Tk 600 (about US$ 17) (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 14). There is very limited paid work available for women in the villages and employment as a BRAC teacher thus gives women a small, regular, year-round income and respected status in the community. Teacher performance is monitored closely with the school setting being highly structured and closely supervised by BRAC's Program Organizers and by parents. There is very little absenteesim among the teachers and the dropout rate is less than 2% (Ibid., 1989, 14). Teachers were shown to demonstrate greater motivation towards their jobs and therefore to dropout of their jobs at reduced rates compared to government schools (Sarker, 1994, 9).

Teacher Training

The teacher training methods used by BRAC have been developed over time through trial and error. The initial twelve days of teacher training emphasize basic concepts of learning theory and practice teaching. The content of the training is child psychology, educational psychology, classroom discipline, relationship development with parents, pedagogy, use of books and teaching aids and organization of co-curricular activities. Five days are spent on concepts and seven days on role-playing as teachers learn how to prepare lesson plans. Teachers are trained in groups of 20 to 25. The training is structured, learner-centered and participatory, designed to allow the teachers to experience the kind of learning that they will be facilitating in the classroom (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 15). Teachers are taught that comprehension rather than memorization is stressed in BRAC schools.

Two days of orientation training are also held before the opening of schools. All teachers attend continuing teacher training refresher sessions one or two days each month. Teachers from about 20 neighbouring villages meet with their supervising Program Organizer to discuss problems and to work on teaching-learning issues. The monthly teacher training days, run by the field supervisors, focus on experiences in the classroom and problems encountered (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 15). Sometimes an experienced teacher from one village will visit a teacher in a neighbouring village to assist with problems. All teachers must attend a six-day refresher-training course at the beginning of the second year of teaching. This course concentrates on deepening the teachers' understanding of learning concepts and on improvements in teaching methods.

Like the Escuela Nueva Program, teacher training for BRAC educators appears to be rather limited. Probably the most important elements in helping BRAC teachers to perform effectively are the very structured curriculum, the use of daily lesson plans and the nature of the learning materials which have been prepared in simple modular form and accompanied by teaching notes. In addition, like EN, the BRAC system has a strong supervision system in place (about one supervisor for every 15 teachers). Thus each teacher's performance is closely monitored and ways are found to help when problems occur (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 16). Weekly visits from BRAC field workers provide regular feedback to village teachers. Supervision and management are participatory. Supervision has a direct relationship with monitoring, follow-up and feedback programs of the BRAC system.

Curriculum Materials

BRAC's curriculum materials were initially developed with the part-time assistance of educational specialists from Dhaka University. BRAC assembled a small core staff of its own educational specialists who worked with the university staff. The combined team spent more than two years planning, developing

and testing the curriculum and materials. The main objectives of the curriculum are to help students to achieve basic literacy, numeracy and social awareness. The curriculum is divided into three subject areas: Bangla (the Bangladesh language), mathematics and social studies (Lovell and Fatema, 17). Bangla is taught for 25 minutes per day, reading for 25 minutes per day, mathematics for 35 minutes per day and social studies for 25 minutes per day. Two 20-minute co-curricular activities are also included.

An important part of each school day is spent on these co-curricular activities designed to develop the child more fully. Activities include physical exercise, singing, dancing, drawing, crafts and games, field trips and storybook reading. Students tend to enjoy these activities which helps to assure high attendance (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 17). BRAC student attendance is significantly higher than in state schools and the completion rate (95%) is almost twice the average for government schools (Oxfam (online), 2001, 3).

The BRAC curriculum is equivalent to grades one to three of the formal school system. In the second year of NFPE English is also included in the syllabus so that children who want to join formal schools later are well prepared. The BRAC schools have no formal annual examinations like those in the government schools. Instead, the progress of students is measured through carefully recorded, continuous assessments by the teacher, utilizing weekly and monthly tests. In addition, students with learning difficulties and cases of individual problems are discussed in the monthly teacher training meetings and solutions are sought. Each day of the week is expected to include certain pre-set activities. BRAC teachers utilize a one-page suggested class routine. As they gain experience, the pace and emphasis of their teaching can be varied to meet the needs of the particular group of children (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 17).

Like in the Escuela Nueva system, the first couple of months of the first grade in BRAC schools is a preparatory phase. Structured modules are designed to develop the child's learning readiness and his or her ability to cope with school. The structured class routine continues after this initial orientation experience. The curriculum of BRAC schools differs from that of the government schools in several significant ways. The major differences between the two systems are more in teaching methods and teacher commitment than in content. Basic reading, writing and mathematics are quite similar in the first two years. However, in the third year, mathematics is taught quite differently in BRAC schools; emphasis is on the uses of mathematics for simple accounting, measurement and the handling of money (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 19). In social studies, BRAC's curriculum is almost totally different from the government's one. BRAC's focus is on health concerns and values related to cooperation, relationships with neighbours, population problems of early marriage, dowry and so on (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 19).

Thus, the BRAC curriculum addresses significantly fewer objectives than does the governments' primary curriculum, especially in languages and mathematics. This leaner curriculum may be the

contributing factor to the program's success. Teachers are able to cover fewer topics at a deeper level (Sharafuddin, 2001, 4). Curriculum materials are carefully sequenced, segmented into short, discrete lessons and attractively printed in small, non-threatening booklets. Concrete examples from the everyday lives of students are used throughout the booklets, especially in the social studies materials.

The BRAC teaching method is intended to be learner-centered and participatory. Whether all teachers achieve this goal is questionable. BRAC schools want children to be active participants in learning rather than passive recipients of information. The emphasis is on functional use of learning, not success in examinations. Inquisitiveness in learners is encouraged (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 19).

BRAC has found that its students require additional reading materials and has thus started publishing a children's magazine which is now distributed in the schools. In addition, BRAC has found it difficult to find stories and books suitable for rural children and is now having stories written and printing its own books for this purpose (Ibid., 18).

Parental and Community Involvement

The more schools BRAC opens, the more the demand grows. All evaluations of the BRAC schools have stated that one of the most important factors in the schools' success is community and parent involvement. "Before a school opens in a village, the parents of the targeted students must demonstrate their desire for their children to go to school. They must help find or build a classroom that can be rented at minimal cost and they decide what hours of the day the classes should be held (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 21)". Parents and BRAC staff meet several times before a new school opens. Parents must pledge to attend monthly meetings and to send their children to school each day. A committee of five manages each school and is made up of two parents, a community leader, the teacher and the BRAC Program Organizer who supervises the school. United, all members take responsibility for solving problems. Parent meetings are held monthly. At meetings parents discuss their children's progress and any school problems that may arise. The committee's duties consist primarily of setting the time for classes and vacation periods, assuring regular attendance (the goal is 100%), cleaning and maintenance of the schools and protecting school furniture from theft and calamities such as floods. School committees and parents also help teachers with special problems that may arise.

When parents begin to see the positive results of sending their children to school, their attitude towards education changes. Children and their parents have come to value education and are willing to sacrifice in order to continue (Lovell, 1992, 56). Community participation in BRAC's education programs has provided encouraging results. Attendance rates have been high (95%) in both programs, dropout rates have been below 1%, and 95% of the graduates have passed examinations allowing them to enter at least

fourth grade in the formal system. In addition, a high percentage of students from both the younger and older groups are going on to the government schools. 87% of the older children and nearly 99% of the younger children have been admitted to the government schools at the fourth-grade level and above (Ibid., 54).

Management and Supervision

"Unfortunately, management has often been a neglected dimension in explorations of development programs in the Third World (Lovell, 1992, 117)". Management and supervision of BRAC schools is accomplished through a structure including a central office Program Manager and staff of one educational specialist, several materials developers and illustrators, a Regional Manager, a Monitor who analyzes and follows up on field reports, and secretarial assistance. Regional managers supervise the field organizers, who in turn supervise the Program Organizers (POs), who directly supervise the teachers and relate to parent groups (Ibid., 51). The education program is also served by various support offices of BRAC. Teacher training is performed in cooperation with BRAC's Training and Resource Centers (TARC). The Area Field Officers have several years of experience in the school program. They are thus the key field management personnel.

The POs are first-line supervisors of the teachers and the schools. The POs receive at least five days of training in effective supervision, and they must attend the 12-day basic teacher-training course along with the teachers. In addition, they must attend the two-week training-of-trainers workshops required of all teacher-trainers. The job of POs is to supervise and assist the teachers and to work with the parent groups. They attend and report on monthly parent meetings and conduct monthly teacher training sessions. POs must visit every school in their district as often as possible and not less than twice a month. Evaluation studies have shown that where the POs are weak the schools are likely to be weak as well (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 29). BRAC has also developed ways to encourage the most disadvantaged families to participate in the decisions that most affect program implementation.

Costs of the Program

The annual cost per student paid for by BRAC is about US $20, roughly equal to the government's formal schooling without factoring in the extra private costs that make the formal schools more expensive. Although government schools are supposed to be free, in practice, students and their families are asked to contribute materials and examinations fees. State elementary schools cost US $51 per child (Oxfam (online), 2001, 3). If the dropout and retention rates of government formal primary schools are taken into consideration, the per capita cost of BRAC schools is very low. This per capita figure covers the full cost

of the program including rental of facilities, teacher salaries, training, recruiting, supervision, materials, curriculum development and management. Parents and the community bear the cost of maintaining the classroom facility, as well as the opportunity cost of losing the labor of their children for a few hours each day. The time they, as parents, lose from work to participate in school responsibilities is also a cost for the community (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 30). BRAC allocates 30% of the NFPE program budget to management and supervision, only 29% to salaries and 6% to rent the school space. This varies from the formal system where most monetary resources are spent on teachers' salaries and school facilities. Thus, BRAC schools are substantially more cost efficient than the government's formal schools (Sharafuddin, 2001, 3).

Going-to-Scale and Innovation-Diffusion

The main factors that have facilitated the rapid growth of BRAC's primary education programs appear to be the NGO's experience and operational mode, its extensive experience with community participation and the existing support systems that are available to the program (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 32). "BRAC has always operated in a learning mode: try something, enlarge on what works, replicate what is effective, change what doesn't work, improve what needs improvement (Ibid., 33)". Over time, BRAC has learned to listen to rural people and has tried to help them achieve what they want. The BRAC education experience has shown that poverty and gender are not insurmountable obstacles to primary education. In addition, success of communities who have experienced BRAC primary schools is spreading to other villages in rural Bangladesh. The demand for opening new BRAC schools is continuous.

Future Development

There are numerous questions to ask about the present and future development of BRAC's primary education programs in addition to the ones posed by this researcher about teacher development. How many BRAC students transfer to government schools? How long do they stay in these schools? To what extent do they succeed? If students drop out, why do they do this? What are the effects of primary education and school continuation on marriage ages? What is to be the continuing role of BRAC schools? Are the schools to serve primarily as experimental models for testing ideas and methods for providing primary education to the unreachable, or should the BRAC school system be expanded and replicated throughout the country? Should the schools be extended to include fourth grade classes and beyond? Can and should the successful elements of the BRAC program be replicated by other NGOs and the Government, making room for BRAC to experiment further with different innovative models? (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 38).

Conclusion

The success of BRAC's primary education programs illustrate what is possible when education systems are adapted to local needs. BRAC fosters a relationship with the Government that is constructive and based on mutual respect. This cooperative atmosphere has led the Government to study the BRAC experiment, to launch its own non-formal program and to encourage other NGOs to launch similar programs (Lovell and Fatema, 1989, 39). BRAC has also succeeded in ensuring increased girls' enrollment. In addition, BRAC has shown that young village women and men can become dedicated and responsible teachers if they are well selected and receive good basic training and continuing refresher training courses, effective and consistent supervision, and structured guidance on what the children should learn and how (Ibid., 36). BRAC teachers gain a sense of self-worth, earn respect from their communities and, in turn, become role models for other teachers as they actively contribute to community development.

Learning more about BRAC's NFPE Program, especially in the area of teacher development, will contribute to the growing body of international scholarship that looks at community schools in the developing world (Farrell, 1998; Haiplik, 2001a; Kochan, 2000; Mfum-Mensah and Haines, 2001). Participating in the gradual compilation of a slowly growing body of information available on community schools is an international, collaborative and collective effort. Globally, a continued commitment to educational experimentation is needed and must be encouraged (Farrell & Campbell, 1997). Thus, further, in-depth evaluations of community schools projects will help researchers, educators and policy makers world-wide to understand what makes these schools so effective in places where daily life is a challenge.

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